I Will Never Claim to be a Good Person

Moral absolutism is a disease of the intellectually lazy

You feel that swelling of pride in your chest, don't you? That self-righteous glow of decency warming your bones because you know you are a better person than I.

Of course you are. Your reputational halo has been delicately curated over decades. You help out at the neighborhood food bank every Thanksgiving. Donated to earthquake relief efforts halfway across the world last year. Hold the door for folks at the grocery store like an angel among the rushed and inconsiderate masses.

Sure, you may occasionally curse under your breath at the rowdy teens hanging around outside the 7–11. But hey, they kind of are little punks when you think about it. Doesn't make you a bad person to acknowledge reality, right? You work your tail off providing for

your family. Pay your taxes on time, every time. Never even gotten a parking ticket, for crying out loud.

You're an early-rising, law-abiding, church-going, mall-shopping, voter-registering paragon of ethical living. The backbone of America, keeping society from crumbling into dystopian chaos. Look around you—at the homeless alcoholics and their illegal encampments taking up valuable space. At the drug addicts wasting their lives chasing oblivion. At the paroled armed robbers who terrorized innocent families in pursuit of their next score. Thank your lucky stars you're nothing like them . . . right?

Have you inspected your "ethical superiority?"

Or perhaps the question we should be asking is: what qualifies any of us to sit smugly atop self-constructed hierarchies of ethical superiority? Have you earnestly inspected the cognitive footprints of your day-to-day existence?

Those silent resentments toward your underachieving sibling or rebellious teenager. The impulsive road ragers when you angrily flip the bird when no one's watching. The self-serving monetary corners when you shamefully cut on taxes or expenses. Those instinctive whispers of bigotry when someone of a different race/religion/orientation enters your peripheral?

We are all deeply flawed, hypocritical beings stumbling through life under constant ethical contradiction. Our desperate claims to certifiable “goodness” are the arrogant refuge of those unwilling to stare dead into their most discomforting moral uncertainties.

When was the last time you paused to interrogate the foundational philosophies underpinning your ethical beliefs?

Scrutinized the invisible assumptions and blind biases influencing your personal moral compass? Dissected the paradoxes between your publicly proclaimed value system and private behaviors?

If we’re being radically honest, most of us are just meandering through the world, reflexively judging and rationalizing through the stubborn lens of our own egocentric universe. We deem the homeless addict a worthless stain on society while blissfully indulging our own regressive tendencies, insulated from rock bottom by socioeconomic privilege.

We pathologize the inner-city gang member for the toxic environment he was literally born into, while coddling our own manifold ethical misdemeanors as mere “mistakes” along our righteous path. We shrug and move on from news stories about wrenching poverty or institutionalized injustice gripping distant lands with the reassuring comfort of “thank God that’s not my reality.”

Who are the pure souls?

And dare I say . . . could those we eagerly deride as societal leeches actually be some of the purest souls among us?

The drug-addled vagrants whose very existence is an unchoreographed masterclass in resilience and resourcefulness amid the depths of affliction. The convicted felons who, having surrendered all material trappings of ego, are left to wrestle with the cold, hard spiritual math of their life choices.

The sex workers who model a pride and work ethic that exhaustedly eludes us within the relative comfort of our daily grinds. Who's to say they don't occupy their own stratospheres of enlightened determination that we privilege-marinating "good people" couldn't even begin to comprehend?

The point is . . . moral absolutism is a disease of the intellectually lazy and ethically complacent. It allows us to nestle comfortably into a cocoon of self-righteousness, buffered from the messy complexities of human frailty and societal inequity. It offers a convenient narrative that neatly categorizes the world into binaries: good versus bad, worthy versus unworthy, us versus them.

Yet, such dichotomies obscure the nuanced spectrum of human behavior and motivation. They fail to account for the systemic injustices that shape individual choices,

or the intergenerational traumas that ripple through lives like an unending curse. They ignore the transformative potential of empathy, redemption, and understanding in favor of a simplistic moral scoreboard.

What if we dared to dismantle these artificial moral hierarchies?

What if we recognized that our shared humanity is woven from threads of imperfection and vulnerability?

Perhaps then we could begin to approach each other with more humility and less judgment.

Imagine replacing scorn with curiosity: instead of dismissing the homeless person as a societal failure, asking what series of events led them to this point. Instead of judging the addict as morally bankrupt, considering what pain they might be trying to numb. This isn't about excusing harmful behaviors but about striving for a deeper understanding of their roots.

In this reframed context, every encounter with another human being offers a mirror reflecting back not only their humanity but also our own. It challenges us to question:

- How can I contribute positively to their story?

- How does my reaction to their situation reveal my own biases and limitations?

This shift doesn't require us to abandon discernment or accountability, but invites us to engage in a more compassionate and constructive dialogue about ethics and existence. It nudges us towards a more inclusive understanding of what it means to lead a "good" life—one marked not by how loudly we proclaim our virtues, but by how deeply we understand and address our shared imperfections.

Thus, the journey toward ethical maturity involves recognizing that goodness is not an inherent state but a continuous process of self-awareness, growth, and connection. It is here, in the messy, unglamorous work of real-world moral engagement, where we find a more authentic form of virtue—one that does not depend on comparisons for validation but thrives on genuine connections and mutual growth.

So, as I reflect on my own imperfections and the shared struggles of our human condition, I embrace the truth . . .

I will never claim to be a good person—but rather, a person committed to the lifelong journey of becoming better.